

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

White Rose Oregon Pinot Noir

White Rose Vineyard is located in the Red Hills of Dundee in Yamhill County. Planted in 1980, the property is adjacent to better-known vineyards owned by Domaine Serene and Domaine Drouhin. The vines are own-rooted, with 8-10 ft spacing, and are Wadenswil and Pommard clones. Located among rolling hills at 820 ft elevation to protect from winter frost, the soils are deep Jory (silty clay loam over a basaltic volcanic rock base with a high water-holding capacity).

This glorious site for Pinot Noir was purchased a few years back by Orange County businessman, Greg Saunders. Although somewhat of a novice at winegrowing and winemaking, his first vintages show him to possess a deft touch with the heartbreak grape. After meeting Greg, I was impressed by his passion to excel with Pinot Noir. Perhaps this enthusiasm is best summed up by a his quote posted on his website: "The new prince (no relation) is coming of age. It is only a matter of time before viticultural secrets held within our vineyards will be exposed. A future is at hand where European myths will fade and Oregon will develop and embrace it's own viticultural heritage." I recently tasted through his lineup of Pinot Noirs and have much to recommend.

2003 Nekaia Pinot Noir (\$15) This is the value package of Greg's wines. A blend of grapes from several purchased sources, it is nicely balanced with enough fruit and spice to hold your attention. An eye-opener for \$15.

2002 Quiotee's Lair White Rose Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$37) A beautiful rose and violet tinged nose leads to a soft, smooth, comforting Pinot experience. Not overblown or alcoholic (13.5%) A "mini-me" of the Estate bottling.

2002 White Rose Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir (\$50) As good as it gets from Oregon. Sourced from the best grapes in the vineyard and only made in special years, this is a killer. The intoxicating nose of cherry pie, roses, and spice goes on and on. Like the Quiotee, it is seamless— soft, smooth, and balanced. It will only get better with a little cellaring.

Two other wineries sourced grapes from White Rose Vineyard in 2002.

2002 Panther Creek White Rose Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$34) Pleasant but not exciting. One-dimensional, a bit out-of-sorts.

2002 St Innocent White Rose Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$35) A big-boy, full-bodied wine that is still a bit closed, but shows marvelous potential. A wine to ponder over and keep a few years. A "big babe" Pinot.

Whether the glass is half empty or half full depends on what Pinot Noir is in it.

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White Rose Pinot Noirs can be purchased at Wine Exchange in Orange, CA, (winex.com) or from the winery's website at whiterosewines.com.

You can also reach Greg at (949) 275-8021 for questions or orders.



Ambullneo: Little-Known But Highly Praised

Ambullneo Vineyards is the small boutique project of Greg Linn. His approach to Pinot Noir is unique in that he believes in blending grapes from several sources rather than site-specific wines. The advantages are many: the winemaker is not dependent on the mercy of a single vineyard, he can blend the grapes in proportions that emphasize and enhance each lot's best qualities, and he can create a totally unique and individual wine unlike any other. Greg likes to defer to the analogy, "What if Burgundy blended La Tache, Musigny, and Chambertain?" He defines "blend" on his label as "pass imperceptibly into one another (harmonize)."

Greg was a long time wine enthusiast who purchased personal cellars and re-sold them to restaurants, wine stores, and personal customers. In addition he put on some outrageous wine tastings in California at some of the best restaurants. Many events were written up by well-known wine writers. His passion for Burgundian varietals led him to start his own winery where he produces very limited quantities of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from select Santa Barbara County vineyards. The Pinot Noir cuvee and true production will vary from year to year depending on the barrels that make the cut and the quality of the grapes from the three vineyards used. In 2004, a Northern California program will be added, including the well-regarded Hyde Vineyard.



The **2002 Ambullneo Bulldog Reserve Pinot Noir** (\$70) was given the highest scores ever given to any Santa Maria Valley wine by Robert Parker, Jr.. In addition, the San Francisco Vintner's Club tasting of California Pinot Noirs (5/25/04) awarded this wine first place in the competition. The blend is 66% Dierberg Vineyard and 33% Solomon Hills Vineyard, both in the Santa Maria Valley appellation. Plum and dark fruits on the nose with a hint of crushed strawberries. The wine explodes on the palate with plums, smoky spiciness, and a rich, seductive texture. Like all great wines, the finish is persistent. 140 cases.

The **2003 Ambullneo Bulldog Reserve Pinot Noir** (\$75) is a blend of grapes from three vineyards: 80% Solomon Hills Vineyard, 10% Dierberg Vineyard, and 10% Laetitia Vineyard. According to Greg, this latest release is very similar to the 2002, but with a tighter core and is less revealing at the start. After an hour in the glass it starts to open and may be a little more complex than the 2002. An appealing combination of great power and finesse. 14.6% alcohol, 350 cases.

The current vintage is available from klwines.com or contacting Greg (cell: 714-227-3464, e-mail at greglinn@adelphia.net).

Joseph Phelps Seeks Pinot Holy Grail

As reported by Dan Berger in the January 6, 2005 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Joseph Phelps Vineyards, known for their Meritage blend, Insignia, have spent at least \$25 million dollars to date in developing vineyard land on the Sonoma Coast to produce world-class Pinot Noir (and Chardonnay). About 100 hillside acres have been planted in Freestone, one of the coolest and windiest growing regions in California. Getting grapes to ripen properly in the chilly climate and ridiculously small yields (neighbor Dan Goldfield says he hasn't obtained more than a ton a acre in the last three years due to poor berry "set" in the cool spring) present major obstacles to success in this area. Nevertheless, many well-known wineries have vineyards in the locality (Benziger, Dutton-Goldfield, Kistler, Miramar Torres, Williams Selyem) and several other vineyards like Summa, Coastlands, Theirot, and Seascape have produced notable Pinot Noirs in the hands of Fred Scherrer, Ted Lemon, and others. The name of the new Phelps project is undetermined, but Phelps owns the rights to the name Freestone. The estate winery, with aging caves, will be completed in 2006, the first year the winery will release a commercial Pinot Noir. Projected production is 12,000 cases of Pinot Noir in good years.

george pinot noir: The “Un” Wine

george levkoff likes to describe his george wine company pinot noir as follows: “unfined, unfiltered, unpumped, unpushed, unadulterated, unblended, unracked, made using gravity only, bottled directly from the barrel.” The only electricity used was for lights and cooling in the winery. george is the only employee of the george wine company, tending the vineyards, sorting the fruit, fermenting the grapes, bottling the wine, cleaning the floor and barrels, paying the bills, and selling the wine. george is an east coast native who moved to los angeles to become a bond trader. His wine epiphany occurred when he went to dinner at joe’s restaurant in venice, california and a friend brought along a 1991 and 1992 williams selyem rochioli vineyard pinot noir. He became determined to move to sonoma county and produce a great pinot noir. Four years later, he sold his house, quit a fourteen year career, and left for healdsburg, california. George attended numerous classes in grape growing and winemaking and received his first break when he was able to work the 1999 crush at williams selyem. He also helped out at brogan cellars, a small “garage” pinot noir producer where he learned to make do with less. About the same time, he struck up a friendship with david hirsch of hirsch vineyards. When hirsch built a winery on his property, he invited george to share his facility and the george wine company was born. (visit the george website at georgewine.com and you will understand about the lower case approach).

The inaugural release is the **2003 George Hirsch Vineyard Block 3A** and the **2003 George Hirsch Vineyard Block 4a**. Block 3A is the Pommard Clone which looks down on Flower’s Camp Meeting Ridge Vineyard and Block 4A is the Mountain Eden Clone from a block looking toward the Marcassin Vineyard and Blue Slide Ridge Vineyard. Total release was 135 cases, 110 cases of 750ml (\$80) and 25 cases of magnums, now **sold out**. The 2004 vintage will be doubled to 260 cases with the addition of Russian River fruit from Lee Martinelli. By 2005, production should reach all of 400 cases.

george is passionate about pinot noir and it may be in your best interest to sign up for his next release. Go to georgewine.com or e-mail george at georgewine@sbcglobal.net. I cannot provide any tasting notes since I only recently snagged a bottle of the Block 3A, but the website is way cool and the pedigree of the source of grapes is well-established. Release price was \$50 from the winery (current retail is \$65-80)



New California Wine

Matt Kramer’s new book, *New California Wine, Making Sense of Napa Valley, Sonoma, Central Coast, and Beyond* (\$25) is a must read for any wine enthusiast who wants the big picture of California wine. Although all varietals are included, there is plenty of useful information on Pinot Noir. For example, he states, “The Dijon clones are terrific. On the other hand, these same clones are almost bullying in their powerful flavors. All of these clones are delicious. But they’re not subtle. In consequence, too many Pinot Noirs made from them can taste too much alike.” Published in 2004, much of the information is current. He breaks down the chapters according to regions, ie Napa Valley, Sonoma County, Mendocino County, Santa Barbara County, etc and discusses the wine-growing history of the appellations, the movers and shakers, the climate and soils of each region, and reviews the major producers with critical comments about his tasting impressions of the wines produced. He concludes with a comprehensive Vineyard Registry.

Another study has revealed that consumption of red wine may reduce the risk of prostate cancer in middle-aged men. Research recently published in the *International Journal of Cancer* from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle found no clear association between the risk of prostate cancer and overall alcohol consumption. But each additional glass of red wine consumed per week showed a statistically significant decrease in the risk of prostate cancer. It is postulated that chemical substances in red wine (for example, resveratrol) may alter tumor cell growth. Research studies on the health benefits of polyphenol rich foods and beverages like wine are underway. If your doctor warns you about drinking, remind him of the saying of Hermann Smith-Johannson, an 103-year-old cross-country skier: “The secret to a long life is stay busy, get plenty of exercise, and don’t drink too much. Then again, don’t drink too little.”



If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir

Join a Pinot Noir Club

Many wine retailers and wineries offer wine clubs where you can purchase wines at a discount on a regular basis. For Oregon Pinot Noir lovers, consider the Avalon Reserve Pinot Noir Club. Two to three bottles of only the best from Oregon are sent out monthly. Month to month subscription is \$120, a 6 month subscription is \$510, and a 1yr commitment is \$825 (all prices are plus shipping). This is a great opportunity to sample premium, low-production Pinot Noirs from top producers.

In January, 2005 the wines were 2002 Soter Beacon Hill Pinot Noir (\$50) and 2002 Bergstrom Estate (\$65). The February, 2005 wines will be two limited release wines, 2003 Shea Block 23 (\$48) and 2003 Shea Homer (\$65).

Sign up at avalonwine.com/wineclubs.

